

INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

1313 EAST 60TH STREET - CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS

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CONTROL OF FORMS AND RECORDS

What is the importance of an effective forms control program and how can such a program be initiated and developed?

Over a period of years most city departments build up numerous forms and records that require a large amount of staff time to use. The cost of a completed record is many times greater than the cost of the blank form. This includes the cost of preparing, handling, distributing, and filing, in addition to the cost of the blank forms. In most cities a brief survey will show that many forms can be discarded, and those that are retained can be redesigned so that they will be easier to prepare, file, and use and thus save staff time. Even more important, a plan for the control of forms inevitably leads to a study of systems and procedures. This report, however, will be restricted in the main to forms control.

Many employees resist change because of long-established habits and customs. Therefore a forms control program should be initiated by and have the active and continuing support of management. Because many of the more important forms are interdepartmental in nature, the primary responsibility for the program should be placed with a staff officer reporting directly to the chief administrator.

Emphasis should be placed on securing the cooperation of all department heads, division heads, and supervisory employees. Several staff meetings might well be dedicated to selling the program to the principal executives. The need for the program should be properly presented and all of the benefits should be carefully outlined.

Establish Responsibilities and Issue Regulations. After laying the groundwork for the program, the chief administrator should issue an administrative regulation (see p. 461) to accomplish the following:

1. Present objectives of the program.
2. Designate a Forms Control Supervisor who will assume responsibility for the program and will serve as the central point of control.
3. Clearly specify the authority and responsibility of the person so designated.
4. Indicate the responsibilities of department heads and the different types of forms to be included in the program.
5. Make clear which forms must have legal review and the types which should be discussed with the finance officers and persons handling independent post-audit work.
6. Outline the procedure in detail to be followed in reordering present forms and establishing new forms.

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7. Direct all departments and activities to furnish the Forms Control Supervisor with two copies of each form in use. This will include form letters, labels, checks, routing slips, tabulating cards, as well as all stock forms, reports, and records.

Establish Identification Numbers and Central Form Files. The Forms Control Supervisor will assign a permanent number to identify each form and the originating department. All forms used by a given department would then bear the same prefix digits with the last digits to identify the particular form in question. Thus, the number 312-21, for example, might be used to identify a purchase order form, the first three digits indicating the originating organization unit and the last digits indicating the individual form. The standard accounting code numbers already used to designate organization units for accounting procedures might well be used for the prefix digits.

After the assignment of numbers, one copy of each form should be filed in numerical order. The second copy may be filed by subject or by function. For complete information as to the arrangement and use of this second file, it is suggested that the Forms Control Supervisor study carefully the various documents listed at the end of this report.

Developing Tentative Standards. After the forms are collected and classified, a set of standards for revising them should be drafted. The standards should serve as a guide in the job of sorting, criticizing, analyzing, and redesigning the city's forms. The Forms Control Supervisor should review the forms, consult with other city employees for their experience in using them, check the publication of business equipment and form supply houses as to form design and layout, and obtain information on standard paper sizes and weights. Notes should be made of any special legal requirements.

The physical aspects of the forms that can be standardized include their size and shape, weight and grade of paper, color of paper and ink, typography and format, whether pre-numbered, type of binding or folding or padding, and the method of reproduction. The standards for form sizes should be such that all forms can be cut without waste from a minimum number of standard paper sizes.

Paper surfaces should be considered from the point of view of the duplicating processes involved, the writing methods that will be used, the erasures that may be necessary, the ease with which the paper can be read, and the protection of the form against alteration. The weight, thickness, and durability of the paper should be considered for the number of carbon copies that may be required, the office machines which are used, the relative permanence of the records, the filing methods, and other factors. Hard and fast rules cannot always be set as to the content of the form or the arrangement of the content. The sequence and arrangement of the items on the form must be determined by an analysis of the working procedures involved.

Review of Forms. The Forms Control Supervisor should cross-compare related forms taken from the functional file in order to determine the extent to which different forms report similar information and thereby catch unnecessary duplication. Another quick test is to inspect stock room records to spot inactive or obsolete forms.

A thoroughgoing review of all the forms involves a three-sided analysis to determine (1) whether the contents of each form are needed by management

or are required by law or good financial standards, (2) whether the design of the form facilitates the use of the best methods to compile it, and (3) whether the working methods represented by the content of the forms are the most efficient procedures.

A study must be made of the flow of each form from desk to desk to determine the work that is performed at each desk. As each step is traced, several basic questions should be asked to check whether the work is necessary and how the work can be improved. For example, can peak loads involving certain forms be smoothed out by better scheduling? Can the sequence of work be changed to advantage? Would mechanical aids speed up the processing of the forms? Does the content of the form require too much preliminary effort to compile the information in view of the use made of the form?

In addition each form should be analyzed for the writing method it requires, the end use of each form, the quantity used, the number of copies filled out at one time, and the number and complexity of the entries, are primary considerations in evaluating the writing methods. If handwriting is used, special considerations may apply. Should loose forms, or padded forms, or units set with interleaved carbon be adopted to facilitate the handwriting methods? If machine writing is used then the size, mechanical specifications, and limitations of the specific machines involved must be determined.

The design of a form is determined largely by its contents and how it is used. But some general rules of layout make the forms easier to fill in and read. For example, is the sequence of items easy to follow? Does the arrangement make for continuous execution? Does the design reduce the amount of writing to a minimum by using check boxes and pre-printed alternatives? Does the design take advantage of writing machine characteristics so that vertical and lateral spacing match the spacing of the machine? Does the design of the form simplify identification, distribution, and control? Is the space on the form used economically? Are unneeded borders eliminated to allow continuous writing into margins?

The content of each form should be simplified to eliminate meaningless words and useless technical jargon. Ordinarily a form should be as nearly self-explanatory as possible without over-burdening it with detail. This need is partly met by the layout and arrangement of the items on the form. Some forms may require complete revision to correct poor English, inadequate phrases, and hazy definitions. Revised editions should be tried out on potential users to test the copy before the form is approved for reproduction.

As the appraisal of current forms proceeds, the chief administrator should keep informed on desirable changes in organization and procedures that would result from the adoption of new forms or the revision or abandonment of old forms. The chief administrator may meet with the departmental officials to review controversial points or to clarify any interdepartmental relationships involved. In addition, information should be prepared to obtain the approval of the city council for the abandonment or revision of forms or reports specified by ordinance.

Simplify the Process of Ordering Forms and Determining Printing Specifications. The process of ordering forms can be simplified by providing the operating departments with a specially designed requisition (see p.465 of this report). Some organizations, which have central forms control, use an elaborate forms requisition requiring full and detailed specifications. Employees in originating

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departments, however, seldom have sufficient technical knowledge to provide all of the necessary information required for both systems analysis and for the information of the printer. Unnecessary work will be caused if detailed specifications must be repeated each time an existing form of satisfactory design is reordered. The requisition form, therefore, should be made very simple and easy for the operating departments to prepare. It need only contain enough information to identify the originating department, the form number required, the date and the account code, plus the amount on hand, monthly use, and amount ordered.

It is suggested that the Forms Control Supervisor be responsible for developing and maintaining a file containing a permanent specification sheet on each approved form (see p.466). The Forms Control Supervisor will secure all information necessary for the specification sheet on each new or revised form by: (1) analysis of rough form samples and supporting information submitted by originating departments with their ordering requisitions; and (2) through field investigation and personal contact with key personnel involved in the procedures of which the form is a part.

When existing forms are reordered the Forms Control Supervisor need only remove the previously prepared permanent specification sheet from the file to provide complete information for printer. If the printing is to be done on city-owned equipment, the specification sheet plus a copy of the requisition will serve as a production order. If the printing is to be done at an outside plant, the bidding instructions will be prepared from these same documents.

Systems Analysis. The establishment of central forms files, a numbering system, and a central point of control will bring about the correction of some of the more obvious cases of poor design, but the major accomplishment will be to bring to light the entire problem so that it may be dealt with properly. Even in a medium-sized city the central forms files will contain literally hundreds of forms, each in need of study. To accomplish the major objectives of the program, attention must be given to systems and procedures, for it is in this area that major savings in clerical costs are possible.

In the smaller cities one person should be able to handle all work necessitated by the program, but it is important that this person work closely with the chief administrator. Care should be taken not to assign too many other duties to the Forms Control Supervisor lest the program suffer from lack of attention. A program such as this can quickly degenerate to the point that it is just additional red tape unless sufficient time is allowed to carefully analyze procedures and related forms.

Training Employees. A training course in forms design should be provided for specified employees designated by department or division heads as Forms Control Officers. Usually this employee would be the business manager, administrative aid to the department head, or chief clerk. The Forms Control Officers should be taught the major principles of scientific design. Also, they should be able to chart and analyze present systems and recommend improvements in methods and procedures. This training course could be broadened eventually to include all of the various aspects of work simplification and office layout.

Note: This report has been prepared with the assistance of the Department of Research and Budget, Kansas City, Mo. (S. M. Roberts, Director) and the Kansas City regulations and forms on pages 461 to 466 have been reproduced with the permission of City Manager L. P. Cookingham.

SUGGESTED ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION ON FORMS CONTROL

(This regulation, which would be distributed to all department heads, may serve as a guide in drafting forms control instructions. It is adapted from an administrative regulation issued in July, 1950, by the City Manager of Kansas City, Mo.).

I. The Importance of the Program

The successful and economical operation of the entire municipal government is dependent upon the efficiency of administrative procedures and their related systems. For this reason, it is essential that all department heads, division heads, and supervisory employees take an active interest in simplification of office procedures. Improvement and simplification of procedures can be accomplished only after objective and searching analysis of present methods.

If this program is to succeed, there must be a willingness on the part of participants to accept what might appear to be radical changes. Each person must guard against the tendency to resist change because of long-established habits and customs. The reluctance of any individual to accept changes will not only hinder improvement but may prolong inefficient and costly procedures.

The three elements of which every system is composed are personnel, equipment, and forms. The forms may be thought of as the raw material to be used by personnel with various types of processing equipment. When all elements of a system are considered, the cost of processing a form is at least ten times, and in some cases 100 times, greater than the actual cost of the blank form. In many activities of our municipal government, such as licensing and assessing, the completed forms are the end product. In other activities, where the end product is a service rendered, such as hospital care, forms are essential aids to the accomplishment of the objective.

The primary aim of the Forms Control Program set forth in this administrative regulation is to increase production through methods improvements so that there will be better utilization of each revenue dollar.

II. Objectives

The objectives of the Forms Control Program as set forth in this administrative regulation are:

1. To eliminate unnecessary operations, reports, and records.
2. To reduce the number of forms by combining and eliminating whenever possible.
3. To standardize and improve the design of forms so that they may serve their purpose more efficiently.
4. To reduce printing costs by properly scheduling production and by applying standards as to design, size, color of ink, type face, etc.
5. To simplify systems, procedures, and working methods.

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III. Responsibilities of Forms Control Supervisor

- A. By the authority and direction of the city manager the director of research and budget department shall be responsible for the proper administration of the systems and forms control program. He shall prepare detailed instructions to supplement this administrative regulation.
- B. As Forms Control Supervisor the director of the research and budget department shall assist city departments in the improvement of procedures. He will:
 - 1. Provide instruction and training for departmental Forms Control Officers in techniques of forms design and systems analysis.
 - 2. Assign members of his staff to assist departmental personnel in forms design and systems analysis.
- C. The director of the research and budget department shall be responsible for reviewing and approving all form requisitions and controlling assignment of form numbers. He will:
 - 1. Make decisions as to forms requiring study.
 - 2. Analyze forms and related procedures applying principles of scientific form design and work simplification to effect economies and improve efficiency.
 - 3. Establish and apply standards as to form design, including layout, size, paper stock, color of ink, type face, etc.
- D. The director of the research and budget department shall be responsible for reviewing and approving any forms and form letters which are proposed to be duplicated by equipment located in any place other than the duplicating section, or are to be printed by commercial printing establishments.
- E. The director of the research and budget department shall keep the the city auditor and the director of finance informed on all proposed revisions in forms and procedures involving the accounting for or processing of city revenues and all other records subject to audit by the city auditor.
- F. The director of the research and budget department shall refer all new and revised printed forms, letters, and similar material to the law department for approval as to legality of wording before printing, if the form or letter is to go to the general public.

IV. Responsibility of Department Heads

- A. Each department head shall be responsible for all forms, form letters, and printed or duplicated material being requisitioned according to the procedure set forth in this administrative regulation.
- B. No forms or form letter shall be produced within any city department by mimeograph or any other duplicating process without first submitting

forms or form letters to the research and budget department. All such forms or form letters to be printed by either the duplicating section or by commercial printing establishments shall be submitted to the research and budget department prior to being printed, except for the following:

1. Ordinances
 2. Legal briefs
 3. Personnel examinations
 4. Internal instructions of a nonrecurring nature and special reports, such as miscellaneous printing of ordinance booklets, etc.
 5. Paper cutting, punching, etc., which is to be done in the duplicating section.
- C. Each director shall designate a person in his department to act as Forms Control Officer. The Forms Control Officer will have the following duties:
1. Check the supply of forms on hand each month.
 2. Initiate all requisitions for forms on the ordering dates assigned.
 3. Maintain book of form samples and records.
 4. Become familiar with principles and techniques of forms design and systems analysis.
 5. Prepare process charts of present systems, recommend improvements, and design and revise forms (assisted by the research and budget department) when necessary.

V. Responsibility of Purchasing Agent

- A. The purchasing agent shall require supervisors in the purchasing division and the duplicating section to inspect each requisition for forms and printing to be done either in the duplicating section or by commercial printing establishments to verify proper approval by the research and budget department, except for the exceptions indicated in Section IV-B. All requisitions covering forms to be purchased from outside printers will be accompanied by a requisition for supplies which will be prepared by the Forms Control Supervisor.

VI. Questions of Policy

Should there be any doubt or disagreement on any matters of policy as a result of the design of new forms, revision of present forms, or changes in procedure, such questions shall be referred to the city manager for the final decision.

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VII. Procedure for the Requisitioning of Forms and Printing

- A. "REQUISITION FOR FORMS AND PRINTING" (see p.465 of this MIS report) shall be used to initiate all printing orders for work to be done by either the city duplicating section or by commercial printing establishments.
- B. For forms presently in use, department Forms Control Officers shall determine the supply of forms on hand immediately prior to order dates assigned. Department Forms Control Officers then shall fill out in quadruplicate REQUISITION FOR FORMS AND PRINTING for each form re-ordered and attach two sample copies of each form. The requisition (in triplicate) with samples attached shall be forwarded to the research and budget department. The quadruplicate copy of the requisitioning form will be retained by the requisitioning department.
- C. If an existing form is to be revised, the department Forms Control Officer shall indicate the changes on the two samples of the form submitted with the requisition and attach a memo explaining proposed changes and reasons therefor. These will be submitted with the necessary REQUISITION FOR FORMS AND PRINTING, in triplicate, to the research and budget department. The quadruplicate copy of the requisitioning form will be retained by the requisitioning department.
- D. If an entirely new form is requested, the department Forms Control Officer shall prepare a rough sample of the new form and prepare a written statement giving complete information showing changes involved in existing systems or any proposed new systems (systems explanations may be shown in the form of procedure charts). Rough sample and written statement and/or procedure charts will be forwarded to the research and budget department with REQUISITION FOR FORMS AND PRINTING in triplicate. The quadruplicate copy of the requisitioning form will be retained by the requisitioning department.

SUGGESTED REFERENCES ON THE STANDARDIZATION AND CONTROL OF FORMS

Simplifying Procedures Through Forms Control, Management Bulletin of Bureau of the Budget. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1948. 49pp. 45 cents. (Contains Good bibliography.)

Forms Control Handbook S-807. United States Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C.

Control Manual Standardization of Forms. Army Service Forces Manual M 703-6, Headquarters, Army Service Forces, Washington, D. C.

Forms Control and Standardization. Department of the Army Technical Manual TM 12-600. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Pearson, Robert W. "Decentralized Forms Control." Article in Advanced Management, May, 1950, Vol. XV No. 5. Society for Advancement of Management, 84 William Street, New York 7. \$1

CITY OF _____
REQUISITION FOR FORMS AND PRINTING

REQUISITIONING AGENCY						
1. Department		2. Division		3. Date	4. Acct. Code No.	5. Reqn. No.
6. Form No.	7. Title of Form			8. Amt. on Hand	9. Monthly Use	10. Amt. Ordered
11. Remarks or Special Printing Instructions (For additional space use reverse side of triplicate and quadruplicate.)						
<p>(This form is $5\frac{1}{2}$ x $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size. See pages 464 - 465 on how it is used)</p>						
12. Requisitioned By		13. Approval By Department Head		14. Received By (to be signed on 3rd copy upon delivery of order)		
				<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Name Date </div>		
RESEARCH AND BUDGET DEPARTMENT - FORMS CONTROL SECTION						
15. Approval By Research and Budget Department		16. Approval By Law Department		17.	18. Sent to Duplicating	19. Should Be Completed
				<input type="checkbox"/> Reorder <input type="checkbox"/> New or Rev.		
20. Order Completed		21. Total Cost				
Name		Date				

FORM SPECIFICATION SHEET

1. Title of Form										2. Form No.		3. Date Authorized / /					
4. Department						5. Division				6. Class of Form <input type="checkbox"/> Intra-Dept. <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-Dept. <input type="checkbox"/> Outside							
7. Paper				8. Size		9. Written Instructions				10. Print				11. Ink Color			
Copy	Code No.	Grain	Col.	Width	Length	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No				<input type="checkbox"/> Face Only <input type="checkbox"/> Head to Head <input type="checkbox"/> Head to Foot							
1																	
2						12. Prenumbered				13. Perforated							
3						Beginning No.				Ending No.		Where					
4												Copies					
5						14. Punching				15. Binding							
6						Where		No. Holes	C to C	Size	Slotted	<input type="checkbox"/> Loose <input type="checkbox"/> No. per Pad <input type="checkbox"/> Stitched <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic <input type="checkbox"/> Ft. <input type="checkbox"/> Bk..					
16. How Form is to be Housed (Binder, File, Etc.)						17. How Filed				Taped		Front Cover	Back Cover	Wrapping Instructions			
										Color		Size					
18. Handling of Form				19. Method of making Entries				20. Retention Period									
<input type="checkbox"/> Lt. <input type="checkbox"/> Med. <input type="checkbox"/> Hvy.				<input type="checkbox"/> Pencil <input type="checkbox"/> Ink <input type="checkbox"/> Typed Other				<input type="checkbox"/> Years in Active File <input type="checkbox"/> Years in Inactive File <input type="checkbox"/> Years in Storage Destroyed at end of <input type="checkbox"/> Yrs.									
21. Explain Purpose and Need of Form - Attach Process Chart or Write-Up of Procedure, if needed.						22. Use of Copies						23. Distribution					
						Copy	1	2	3	4	5	6		Copy	Routed to		
						Info.								1			
						Action								2			
24. Name other Departments and/or Divisions concerned with the Subject Matter or Functional Activities of the Form - indicate by Form Number any Form made Obsolete by Form in Question.						Filed						3					
												4					
												5					
												6					
25. Spec. Sheet made out by				26. Spec. Sheet approved by				27. Legal Approval				Date Sent / /		Date Returned / /			
28. Procedure and Form Design Study				29. Assigned for Study to				Date Assigned / /				Will Finish / /		Study Completed / /			
<input type="checkbox"/> Made <input type="checkbox"/> To be Made <input type="checkbox"/> Not Needed																	
30. Remarks																	
31. Reorder Data																	
Date Ordered	Job No.	Sent from Research	Quantity	32. Production Time													
				Composition	Negative	Plate	MR & PR	Bindery									
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(This form is 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 inches in size and printed on heavy paper stock)